

Part IX

1990-2005

In 1990, the long awaited Interstate 40 was connected to Wilmington, and the region began an era of unprecedented and sustained growth. New Hanover County became one of the fastest growing areas in the state and nation.



Retirees found the climate, beautiful beaches, good medical facilities and a growing University of North Carolina at Wilmington very attractive. They also considered good library services a welcome draw to the area. In 1991, the library checked out as many books in four months as it did during the entire year of 1987.

Building a Park

The library's goal of opening branches in the growing areas of southern and northeast New Hanover County was put on hold as a more urgent problem was addressed—the planned construction of a gas station and convenience store next to the entrance of Main Library.

Concerned library aficionados, as well as downtown businesses and residents, formed the Urban Park Downtown Advisory Committee. County Commissioners were amenable to buying the property for a park if the group could raise \$150,000 to help in the effort.

In February 1993, grading began on the park when Carolina Savings Bank and Branch Banking & Trust Company donated



Performance in the Carolina Courtyard

\$100,000 to the cause.

Al Frega's sculpture, The Chalice, was chosen for the Carolina Courtyard water feature.

The park and urban sculpture were welcome additions to intercity revitalization. The park also allowed the library to move programming outside. Guest storytellers, book signings, volunteer luncheons, music in the park and other happenings became common.

Myrtle Grove Library

Meanwhile, in 1991, John Sawyer was chosen as Architect for the Myrtle Grove Branch Library, which would be located at Monkey Junction to serve the southern end of the county. A state/federal grant for \$231,238 helped

move the project forward. Clancy & Theys Construction Company was awarded the contract in May 1992.



The Myrtle Grove Branch Library was dedicated on September 2, 1993. The new branch was an instant success, especially with children.

Nearby residents flocked to the library for popular reading and for children's story times. Statistics show the New Hanover Public Library system grew exponentially.

Plaza East Branch Opens

For many years there had been talk of a branch in the Wrightsville Beach area of the county as well. Landfall, an enormous gated community, began development nearby in the mid-1980s and Porters Neck, another nearby residential community, was expanding. By the 1990s the rapidly growing population wanted branch library services. On February 7, 2003, the Plaza East Library, an urban

branch in a shopping center with the same name, was dedicated; and the College Square Branch was closed.

An unfortunate but necessary result of the new branch was the termination of bookmobile services. It was obvious that New Hanover

County was becoming too urban for the traditionally rural service. The library's mobile outreach, however, continued to serve hundreds of homebound residents.



Plaza East Branch Library

In all, four lasting changes in the library system took place in 1993: Carolina Courtyard became a reality, the Plaza East and Myrtle Grove branch libraries opened, and bookmobile service ended.

A Time of Growth

During the mid-90s, demand for library services grew by leaps and bounds. In 1995, 3,000 children participated in the Summer Reading Program. Both adult and children's programming reached all time high turnouts. "War & Remembrance," "The 21st Century" and the "Let's Talk About It" series, as well as "The Civil War" and other local history weekly programs, were very popular. The next



Summer Reading Program at Main Library

year, the library system checked out over one million books for the first time! Reserves for current bestsellers reached into the hundreds. The Friends of the Library stepped in to help by purchasing